

India House,
New York City.

New York Co.

HABS No. 4-2

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District No. 4
Southern New York State

REDUCED. COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Wm. Dewey Foster, District Officer,
25 West 45th Street, New York City.

INDIA HOUSE
Number One, Hanover Square
New York City

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Location and Date

India House, the headquarters of a society of persons interested in American shipping and commerce occupies the entire width of the narrow block on the south side of Hanover Square. It stands between Stone and Pearl Streets on William Street which here curves eastward. Without reverting to the contour of the shore front at this point in Dutch and English Colonial times, or to the early land titles there (these being fully described by Miss Jennie F. Macarthy, historical expert of the Title Guarantee & Trust Co., in

Vol. II. of Stokes' Iconography of Manhattan Island), suffice it to say that the great fire of Nov. 16 and 17, 1835, razed all the buildings in this part of the city as far north as Wall Street. (Ibid., V: 1735-36.)

A small pamphlet presenting a brief historical and descriptive account of the building, prepared by Mr. H. T. Foster, of the N. Y. Title & Mortgage Co., for general distribution by India House, states: "It is very probably that the building now standing at No. 1 Hanover Square is really the first structure that was built on this property as a whole... While the tax records of New York City do not go back to this date, other records showing transfers of the real estate involved, without describing the buildings thereon, indicate that the present home of India House was built by one Richard Carman in the general reconstruction of 1837 which followed the big fire."

Architectural and Historical Description

It is likely that when first built the edifice consisted of two office buildings. A lithographic view of it, dated 1850, hanging on the wall

India House

of one of the third-floor dining rooms of India House, shows two separate entrances with stone steps leading to each, and the name "Hanover Buildings" above the cornice. The north facade in the view shows three stories of windows above the basement, and these windows, eight in number on each floor, were evenly spaced except at the centre where the space between them is wider,--made necessary, doubtless, to accommodate the original central division-wall between the two buildings.

The Hanover Bank acquired the property in 1851 (so Mr. Foster says). and took for itself the old name of the Square. It occupied half of the building for banking purposes, while the other half was used by Robert L. Maitland & Co., a firm of tobacco importers. What if any changes were made in the interior or on the exterior at that time is not definitely known.

After the Hanover Bank moved out, the property came into the possession of Robert L. Maitland (see pamphlet above mentioned); and in 1872 was occupied by the New York Cotton Exchange, for whom the two buildings were altered into a single building with one central entrance on the first floor reached by stone steps. Where now the central entrance-hall is was then the "pit" of the Exchange. The present stairway with its heavy black walnut posts and rails was probably built at that time. The metal balustrade now on the building above the roof line was also added, it is believed, when the two buildings were thrown together by the removal of the division-wall.

The Exchange was there until 1885, when the building was acquired by William H. Grace & Co., ship-line owners and bankers. (See pamphlet.) The purchase by them of three adjacent houses on the south more than doubled the area of the property; and again alterations were necessary

India House

to fit the combined buildings for the mercantile-marine interests of the new occupants. They remained until 1913, when they occupied larger quarters in the new office building opposite on Pearl Street.

"India House, as an organization, came into being in 1914 when a group of business men, headed by James A. Farrell and Willard Straight, decided to found a meeting-place in the interest of foreign trade." The building at Number One, Hanover Square being vacant, India House rented it from George Ehret who was then the owner. (See pamphlet.)

"Extensive alterations were made and the rooms fitted out in the spirit of the early American over seas trade." Mr. Straight donated Chinese art objects. Mr. Farrell, the president, gave then and later rare ship-models, engravings and paintings. The American Asiatic Institute gave a collection of pictures of asiatic countries and engraved portraits of leaders of American commerce. Mrs. Straight made an outright gift of objects previously loaned to the Club, including 35 ship-models, marine relics, paintings and prints. All of these objects, now distributed throughout the several dining-rooms, lounge, office, corridors, etc., of the building vividly illustrate the sailing-ship era and seafaring life.

Early in 1918, Willard Straight bought the property with the idea that India House might some day wish to own it. After his death, Mrs. Leonard Elmhirst (formerly Mrs. Straight) generously arranged convenient terms for India House to purchase the property in February, 1921. On the expiration of certain leases in 1924, the interior was rearranged and rebuilt with most effective harmony of architectural details by Mr. W. A. Delano, architect, of New York. One of the most

India House

attractive features is the beautiful Marine Room which was created at that time, also the work of Mr. Delano.

Written, April 24, 1934, by

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Approved:

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